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MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS

SINCE 1877

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

777 attendees turned out to be the perfect number for Glorieta on the Gulf, the 2008 Growing Churches Conference held in August at First Church, Biloxi.

"That's a real exciting number," said Glenn Shows, consultant in the Discipleship and Family Ministry (DFM) Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB), which was the lead sponsor for the event along with nine surrounding associations. "We were pleased with the attendance and want to thank those who participated — some who came from far beyond the local area. This gives us a great base on which to build for next year."

Glorieta on the Gulf, the 2008 Growing Churches Conference, featured 125 topics and 85 instructors from Mississippi and across the Southern Baptist Convention. With the sessions spread all around the church, participants were able to choose among the topics and times presented, and attend only those sessions that addressed their specific ministries.

"I believe it was one of the best Growing Churches Conferences since I came in 1995," Shows said. "It was well-organized, and I heard a lot of comments such as, 'This is giving me what I've been looking for.'

Shows said he was surprised with the reception given the Spanish-language



GLORIETA ON THE GULF — Kevin Chenoweth, pastor of adult ministries at First Church, Dexter Mo., leads discussion for Let's Have a Party, one of the 125 topics that were part of Glorieta on the Gulf, the 2008 Growing Churches Conference, held in August at First Church, Biloxi. The session dealt with how to develop a vibrant Sunday School program outside the walls of the Sunday School rooms. Plans are currently underway for the 2009 Growing Churches Conference July 24-25 at Harrisburg Church, Tupelo. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

sessions, which had to be moved to larger rooms because of overwhelming demand. "Spanish-language ministries are booming in the state, and will be an important part of Mississippi Baptist ministries in the future."

Shows expressed appreciation for the personnel in the nine surrounding Baptist associations for their involvement in making the conference a success, managing the logistics and encouraging members of their association's churches to attend.

Don Hicks, the DFM consultant who will take over as the DFM representative on the 2009 Growing Churches Conference planning committee, said as many as 200 sessions are being lined up for the 2009 conference July 24-25 at Harrisburg Church, Tupelo.

The 2009 conference is being sponsored by MBCB and 12 Baptist associations in northeast Mississippi.

David Michel, MBCB associate executive director for mission strategy, will also lead a team that will present a one-day, Growing Churches mini-conference on May 30 at Temple Church, Hattiesburg.

The 2009 conference in Tupelo will add a worship service to the sched-

ule, Hicks said. The featured speaker will be Mickey Dalrymple, president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention and pastor of First Church, Columbus.

"Growing Churches 2009 will offer inspirational and informative conferences led by some of Southern Baptists' proven talent," said Marc Howard, steering committee co-chair and missions director for Lee Association in Tupelo and Itawamba Association in Fulton. "The body of Christ will come together to be equipped with a choice of relevant tools needed to grow a healthy New Testament church in Mississippi."

Michael Bowers, education minister at NorthStar Church, Tupelo, and faculty enlistment leader for the steering committee, said, "The Growing Churches Conference is a training event where any member of a local church can come to receive training and encouragement to better enhance their role within the body of Christ. God wants our churches to grow spiritually and numerically. The Growing Churches Conference prepares us to be a part of that growth."

For more information on the 2009 Growing Churches Conference, contact Lee Association at (662) 566-1700. E-mail: lcba@lwol.com.

GC
GROWINGCHURCHES



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This issue of The Baptist Record closes out yet another extraordinary year in the annals of Mississippi Baptist life, and life in general. Events have transpired in 2008 that we could not have possibly anticipated in the last few days of 2007.

Yes, 2008 has been an eventful year. Life has many ways of surprising us—and shocking us. It seems appropriate to be celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior in the midst of all the world's turmoil and tragedy and anxious anticipation for the future, for it is into just such an environment that He came to offer the peace for which the world even today so desperately yearns.

It is supremely sad that the answer to that yearning continues to be rejected in modern times as it was two millennia ago, for He is as willing today as ever to help us (Rev. 3:20). We need only ask Him.

Instead, we stubbornly seek to find our own way. To acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is to submit to His will for our lives, and we don't want to even think about that. We want what we want, and we want it now.

Whether it's a second ice cream cone or the destruction of human life in the womb, we want everything our way. Too often, we believe ourselves to be in charge of our own destiny.

No wonder the human race is in such a mess. As earthly parents are apt to do on a

Christmas is... Jesus" is the message on the bumper stickers provided this Christmas season by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

In the center of the bumper sticker is a natural-colored, wooden nativity set with the barn-like structure, a palm tree to the left side with the six-point star at the peak of the roof. Under the star are figurines of Joseph and Mary kneeling behind the manager, holding baby Jesus. Positioned on the right is one shepherd with two lambs standing and one sheep lying on the ground at rest. Positioned to the left are another sheep with two wise men standing and the third kneeling.

Is this such a familiar scene that we have lost the wonder of it all? Christmas is... Jesus!

Would you have ever thought we Christians would have to be bold and vocal in our country and society to define what Christmas is, and who it is about? Yet in this 21st century following His super-

The Light in the storm



frequent basis, our Heavenly Father has every right to ask, "Didn't I tell you the right way to do this? Didn't I show you the way? Why won't you listen to me?"

The story is told of a farmer who looked outside his bedroom window one bitterly cold evening and spied a flock of disoriented birds in his yard, dying in the huge winter storm that was blowing through the area. He decided he had to save them.

Braving the howling wind and blinding snow, he managed to open the doors to his spacious, warm barn—but the birds could not comprehend what the kind farmer had done for them. None of them moved.

The farmer got in front of them and tried to lead them into the barn, but they didn't follow. He got behind them and tried to shoo them into the barn, but they only scattered. He shouted at them and waved his arms, but that only made matters worse.

Nothing seemed to help, but then he had an idea. He raced back to the barn and

turned on the large, bright light inside. Within a few seconds, a couple of the birds found their way to the light and the safety of the barn. Within a few minutes, more of the birds had reached shelter.

To the farmer's dismay, however, the remainder of the flock stayed right where they were. Trusting their own instincts in the midst of grave danger, they shunned the life-saving light in the barn until it was too late. They died an agonizing death in the snow.

So it is with God and His plans for us. In the midst of our earthly confusion and turmoil! He opened wide the doors of heaven, but we didn't rush in. He tried to lead us, but we didn't follow. Somehow, we missed all the signals of his concern for us until He turned on the Light (John 8:12).

Christians have seen that Light, and have been saved. Many more people have not seen that Light, though, and will die an agonizing eternal death not understanding the meaning of the Light offered to them by God.

Can you think of a better present for Jesus' birthday than to show as many people as possible the way to the Light? Without that Light, there is no hope for the lost people of this world. They cannot find their way on their own, yet don't understand the meaning of the Light. Leading them to the Light is a big responsibility (Matt. 28:18-20), but that is what our Lord and Savior has asked us to do.

After what He did for us, it's the least we can do for Him.

Updated from original publication on December 20, 2007, and reprinted by request.

GUEST OPINION: What is Christmas?

By Carl Myers
Missions Director
Pearl River Association

natural intervention into human history, and in our nation that was founded on Christianity, we must be vocal, persistent, and yes, even the champion for Christ.

Why? It is really simple. Christmas is... Jesus!

Christ, one of the names Jesus is called, is the first part of the word Christmas. How can anyone miss this? Christ is English for the Greek Christos, meaning "anointed one," translated from the Hebrew word Machiach, or Messiah. Mas, the second syllable in

Christmas, is an abbreviation of maesse from the Latin word missa meaning service, indicating worship service.

Christ's mass is the original thought representing a worship day remembering Christ's birth. This dates back to the early 300s A.D. in Christian church history.

Why the need for a profound proclamation that Christmas is... Jesus? Sad to say, we have become a selfish, self-centered, all-about-me society of people that has moved from Jehovah God, in rebellion thinking we do not need him in our lives. We have chosen everything this world has to offer but refused His love, grace, and forgiveness provided and demonstrated by His only Son Jesus the Christ.

We believers in Christ—the Christian church—have failed to live, share, and win our children, grandchildren, and neighbors to Christ. Our nation is no longer a Christian nation where Christianity is growing. Over the decades we have

allowed the watering down of Christian faith, belief, and practice. We have moved to great tolerance and political correctness in our society so that whatever anyone believes spiritually, everything is okay.

In doing this, every false religion, worship-anything faith, no-god faith (atheism), and any other "ism" is more important than a relationship with the living God. Thus, is there any surprise that in our U.S. society the greeting of the December celebration season is "Happy Holidays?"

Christians know that Christmas is... Jesus!

What do we do? How can we respond? Tell the great story of faith, hope, and love from a loving Heavenly Father that sent His only Son to take on human flesh by being born to a young virgin woman; to live a sinless life and present a Godly example; who at the age of 33 years died on a cruel Roman cross for the human debt of sin against a Holy God; with His shed blood redeemed (bought back) our souls so we can have a faith relationship with God.

Jesus rose again to life on the third day, conquering the sting and condemnation of spiritual death, and ascended back to Heaven to stand at the right hand of the Father waiting to receive all people who will accept and believe in Him as Savior and Lord.

Jesus is the Greatest Gift ever given to the human race. Will we receive this gift, and then share it with others? Christmas is... Jesus!



Edict may spell end of Chinese churches

WASHINGTON (BP) — China's ministry of civil affairs has issued a statement calling for the elimination of the Chinese House Church Alliance, according to reports circulated by China Aid Association and Voice of the Martyrs, a move some say "could well cause the abolishment of all the Christian house churches" in the communist country.

"It has been found through investigations that the 'Chinese House Church Alliance' is not registered, and it engages in activities in the name of a social organization without authorization," said the statement, which includes the official seal of the ministry of civil affairs. "... This agency has hereby made the decision to abolish the 'Chinese House Church Alliance."

The alliance, led by Zhang "Pastor Bike" Zhang Mingxuan, was established in 2005 and has been engaging in Christian missionary work and charity activities, according to the U.S.-based China Aid Association Dec. 9.

News of the crackdown follows harsh rhetoric by Zhou Yongkang, the leader of the Central Political and Legislative Committee within the Communist Party, who in recent months called for "extraordinary measures to be taken against house churches."

News reports did not indicate whether the two occurrences were directly linked.

"The Chinese House Church Alliance has always abided by the principles of 'serving the church, committed to the society, concerned about public interests and engaging in activities in accordance with law,'" stated a declaration against the abolishment, signed by 15 Christian legal professionals in China.

The declaration added that the alliance conforms with the Chinese constitution which states, "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of

profession and of demonstration."

"All types of gatherings by house churches and Christians are the basic form of expression of the Christian belief and should not be subject to unjust restriction or deprivation," the legal professionals wrote. "...If this order of abolishment continues to be used in other expanded areas, this could well cause the abolishment of all the Christian house churches."

China Aid reported that Zhang, who has been imprisoned repeatedly for preaching the Gospel, was detained by four

officers in Henan province Nov. 28. Authorities demanded that he sign the ministry's statement, but he refused. On the same day, Zhang's wife and 17 other Christians — including an American reporter — who were worshiping in Zhang's home also were detained. Government officials confiscated Bibles and personal property and later released the Christians, China Aid said.

On Dec. 4, Zhang and his attorney went to file an administrative statement of complaint against the government's decision to abolish the house church alliance, but the local court declined to accept the case. Court officials denied that a legal document had been issued regarding the churches, China Aid said, noting that "this is a tactic used by government officials to protect government interests and to delay responsible actions on this case."

Zhang's oldest son was brutally beaten by Chinese gov-



FATHER AND SON — Zhang Mingxuan (right), known affectionately as "Pastor Bike" and chairman of the Chinese House Church Alliance, talks with his son Zhang Jian in this file photo. Zhang Jian was severely beaten by Chinese security officials Oct. 16, according to the China Aid Association, and his father has been detained and beaten several times in recent years. The communist government is now calling for the elimination of the Chinese House Church Alliance. (BP photo courtesy of China Aid)

ernment officials in October when he tried to intervene in the officials' harassment of his mother. The son's right eye was severely wounded, his nose bone and eye bone were broken, and he was unconscious for a time.

An update on his status was not available on the China Aid website.

Meanwhile, China Aid released an update on Shi Weihan, the Christian bookstore owner who has been imprisoned since March for distributing Bibles and other literature. No charges have been filed against him, and Chinese law permits the government to hold him up to three years without charges, China Aid said.

"Recently friends of China Aid visited Christian prisoner Shi Weihan's family and reported to China Aid about the family's situation and ongoing persecution by the Chinese government," the Dec. 9 news release said. "...Shi Weihan suffers from diabetes

and has lost a considerable amount of weight in prison, but since China Aid's last report in September, he appears to be in better health and receiving his medication.

"Friends report that he continues to lead fellow prisoners to the Lord," China Aid said.

The watchdog group said President Bush is personally aware of Shi's case and has requested periodic updates on his status. Also, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing has expressed concern over Shi and Zhang, and the U.S. Department of State mentioned Zhang by name in a news release Oct. 23.

"We are concerned about a pattern of intimidation of religious freedom and rule of law advocates and their family members," the state department said. "We urge China to honor those international human rights instruments to which it is a signatory that protect the rule of law, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion."



THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

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No. 48



YOU CAN RESPOND
RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)

2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)

3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)

4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

GO TELL the story of Jesus

Give so others like you can hear

LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING

IMB.org

Looking back

10 years ago

Plans are made for YouthLink 2000, a three-day event Dec. 29-31 which plans to draw 200,000 students to seven different cities: Anaheim, Atlanta, Denver, Houston, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Tampa, all linked by satellite, to celebrate New Year's Eve.

20 years ago

First Church, Laurel, celebrates its 100th anniversary by entering a float in the Laurel Christmas parade. The float depicts an old-fashioned preacher with an old-fashioned congregation at one end, and modern-day carolers in front of a modern-day church at the other.

30 years ago

Southern Seminary is placed on probation by the American Association of Theological Schools for one year because of a controversy between the school's administrators and the faculty which resulted in the dismissal of 13 professors.

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By Charles Marx, 1932 - 2004
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OWPV KXY: YRYUYX

Clue: L=T

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Colossians Four: One

WISH LIST

As a child, it was always an exciting time of the year when the Wish Book arrived at our house. For those of you who are old enough to remember it, the Wish Book was that large Christmas edition of the Sears & Roebuck catalog. It was loaded with appealing pictures of toys and goodies. Youngsters spent hours staring at it and dreaming. Sometimes we were allowed to write down what we would like to have, prioritizing what we might get and leaving out things that we might not get. Around our house, our wishes and wants were a lot larger than the reality of what we would receive. Looking back on it, I realize that the excitement, the joy, and the anticipation were as big as or even larger than the gifts received. Writing the wish list was an exciting and fun time leading up to Christmas. My wish list then, as a lot of wish lists now, only involved those kinds of things that given a little bit of time would either break, no longer be fashionable, or would just simply lose their appeal. The things for which we wished were more often than not the kind of things that if you did not have them, you would still survive.

Just before Thanksgiving this year, I was at a funeral of one of our pastors, Robert Carr, who had been pastor of Pleasant Hill Church at Union Church for 39 years. He had not only been a faithful pastor for many years but even more significant was the fact that he had been a wonderful husband and father. At the funeral, his preacher son Mike Carr spoke so eloquently about his dad's life, influence, and ministry. Mike, who is the third of their children, said in his message that they did not have everything that money could buy but they had everything that money cannot buy. What an incredible statement and what a significant thing for a family to realize. Too many families are just the reverse. They have so much of what money can purchase and so

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Directors

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

little or none of what cannot be bought. This year my wish list for each of you would include some of those things that money cannot buy:

Peace — Our world seems to be in chaos. Everywhere you turn, there is some new emotionally-charged, heartbreaking, and overwhelming experience or disaster. It may be fires that seem to ravage the western coastline repeatedly, terrorists striking in India, or a financial debacle that those folks who are in a position to know all of the inner workings about the economy do not seem to have a clue as to what to do to help us recover. In the face of any and all of those things plus thousands of others, peace is still available. The problem is that it is not the kind of peace that most people want or demand. It is not obtained by simply paying off a bill, finding a new relationship, or getting a new job. Rather, it is a peace that comes from knowing that you know the Lord and that you are living in the center of His sweet and gracious will.

Participation — Among the great needs of a human being is the need to be useful and to feel as though you are genuinely a part of something that is significant. Well friends, my wish for you is that you would experience that this Christmas. One of the great privileges that we experience in our churches is the joy of being a part of a great mission force that is seeking to go to every people group on the planet and tell them about Jesus. It seems to be an overwhelming and impossible task — and in our own strength as an individual it certainly is — but when we are joined together and fused with a

power that comes from heaven itself we are able to send and support missionaries that are going everywhere with the Gospel of Jesus. This Christmas, one of the joys that you can experience is not from something you get but from something you give. Your participation in the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions will truly honor the Lord and will create a spiritual attachment between you and missionaries around our globe.

Person — Of all of the things that you may want and all of the things that you may need, nothing is more important than to have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Himself. When James said, "Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above" (Jam. 1:17), he was describing any and all things that God provides for us, but supremely the gift of His Son Jesus. In Romans Paul said, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). If you know Jesus, you are ready to live and you are ready to die. Life is centered in a personal and wonderful relationship with him. If someone were to just walk up to you and ask, "Do you know Jesus?" what would you say? If you said, "No," the fact is that today you can know Him. If you said,

"Yes," when and where did you meet Him? What happened in your life when you came to know God's Son as Savior? Christmas is Jesus! It was, it is, and it always will be, but do you know Him? If you do not, my wish list includes this moment for you where you can pause and invite Him into your heart. Your Christmas prayer could be something like this: "Lord Jesus, I know I have sinned. I know that you came to die for my sins. Right now, I trust my life, my future, and my all into your hands. Forgive me and save me right now."

If you prayed that prayer, the greatest of all gifts now is within you. Merry Christmas!

The author can be contacted at jfutral@mbcb.org.

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Heartland state battling same sex marriage ruling

DES MOINES, Iowa (BP)—Iowa's Supreme Court heard oral arguments Dec. 9 in a closely watched case that could make it the third state — and easily the most conservative one yet — to recognize same sex marriage.

The seven justices considered the case more than a year after a lower court judge, Robert B.

Hanson, struck down the state's pertinent laws and ordered it to legalize same sex marriage. The decision was appealed.

The high court asked tough questions of both sides for 100 minutes and gave no indication of when they might rule. If oral arguments are any indication, the vote could be close.

Justice Brent R. Appel asked Assistant Polk County Attorney Roger Kuhle, who was defending the current law, if he believed children in traditional households would be harmed if the state legalized same sex marriage. Kuhle consistently argued in court that changing the marriage laws could have a dramatic impact on society.

Kuhle said the current marriage laws are needed to promote children being raised by a mother and father. "One could easily argue, and we do,

that the state, by fostering same-sex marriage, will harm the institution of marriage as we know it and could defeat its vital purposes... If the court upheld the trial court's ruling, we're not going to see any changes tomorrow, next week, next year, probably not for a generation.

"When the state says that it's not relevant who raises a child... people will see or could come to believe that if it's not necessary for a child to have its biological mother or its biological father, then what's the need for even getting married? The state will be teaching that it's not necessary."

Much to the delight of social conservative attorneys, Kuhle's office embraced the argument that the unique procreative abilities of opposite-sex couples are at the heart of traditional marriage laws. That stands in contrast to examples in other state courts where attorneys opposed to same sex marriage have avoided the procreation argument.

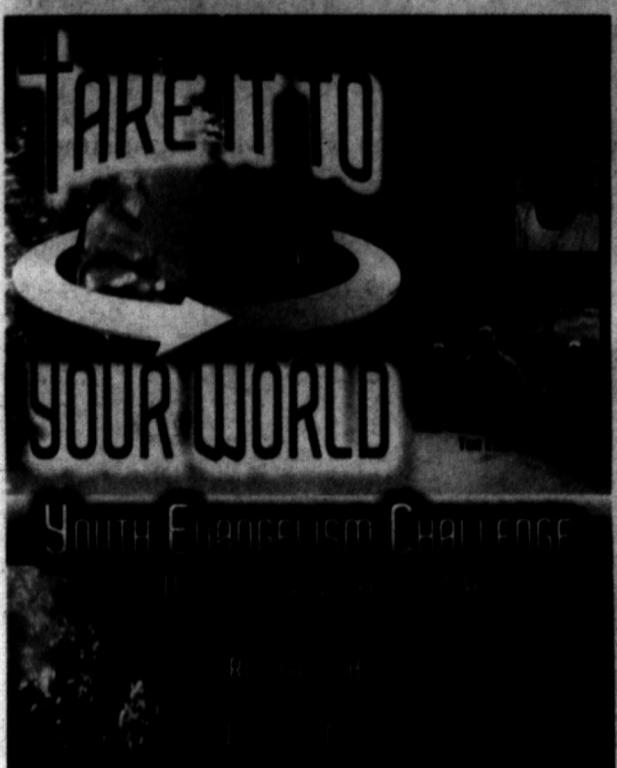
"How does a father teach a daughter, a girl, to be a woman?" Kuhle asked. "How does a woman teach a boy to be a man? Our experts don't believe that that is ideally done or well done by a person of the same sex."

Kuhle also argued the issue was one "for the legislature to decide," and not the courts.

The lawsuit was filed in December 2005 on behalf of six same-sex couples by Lambda Legal, a homosexual activist group. Iowa was targeted in part because of the court's makeup and in part because Iowa's constitution is difficult to amend, requiring the legisla-

ture first to OK an amendment before it goes to voters.

Unlike 30 other states including Mississippi, Iowa does not have a constitutional marriage amendment, and the legislature has been cold to the idea. Democrats control the state House and Senate. Iowa would become the first state in the heartland to grant marriage licenses to same-sex couples.



New Orleans Seminary to offer bivo music ministers' course

JACKSON, Ms. (Special) — January 12 begins the seventh of eight courses at six locations in Mississippi sponsored by New Orleans Seminary and Providence Learning Center, the seminary's conferencing and continuing education office.

The course, Study of Church Music Resources, will meet once a week for two hours for eight consecutive weeks at the following locations and times:

- Broadmoor Church, Madison, beginning January 19 (6:30-8:30 p.m.). Jimmy McCaleb, teacher (601) 924-1233.

- First Church, Booneville, beginning January 20 (7-9 p.m.). LuAnne Ford, teacher, (662) 728-6272.

- Northcrest Church, Meridian, beginning January 13 (6:30-8:30 p.m.). Buddy McElroy, teacher, (601) 938-8668.

- First Church, Greenwood, beginning January 20 (6:30-8:30 p.m.).

Barry Bouchillon, teacher, (662) 897-3075.

- Easthaven Church, Brookhaven, beginning January 12 (7-9 p.m.). Mark Hamilton, teacher (601) 894-5848.

- Handsboro Church, Gulfport, beginning January 20 (7-9 p.m.). Louis White, teacher, (228) 896-3796.

There is a one-time enrollment fee of \$25.00. The cost of each course is \$125.00. A \$60.00 scholarship is available for all first-time students. Students already enrolled are not eligible. The grant is limited to one person per church.

The eight courses are designed to provide basic training for bivocational music directors and other music leaders in churches. The cycle of courses is scheduled over a two-year period. The eight courses meet two hours per week. Each course is eight weeks in length. Each course is independent and has no prerequisite. Each student

who completes the eight courses earns a certificate from Providence Learning Center.

The eight courses in the cycle are Song Leading; Worship Planning; Reading Music; Rhythm/Pitch; Reading Music;

Harmony/Melody; Hymnology; Music Administration/Staff Relations; Survey of Church Music Resources; and Class Voice.

For more information, contact the teachers listed above or Jimmy McCaleb, Church Music

Department, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3273 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 273. E-mail: jmmccaleb@mbcb.org.

Executive Committee selects officers



The newly-seated 2008-09 Executive Committee of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, meeting in the Baptist Building in Jackson on December 2, elected Hal Bates (center), pastor of First Church, Collinsville, to serve as chairman. Chosen to serve with Bates were vice-chairman Buddy Huff (right), member of First Church, Jackson, and secretary Bobby Kirk, member of Roundaway Church, Doddsville. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

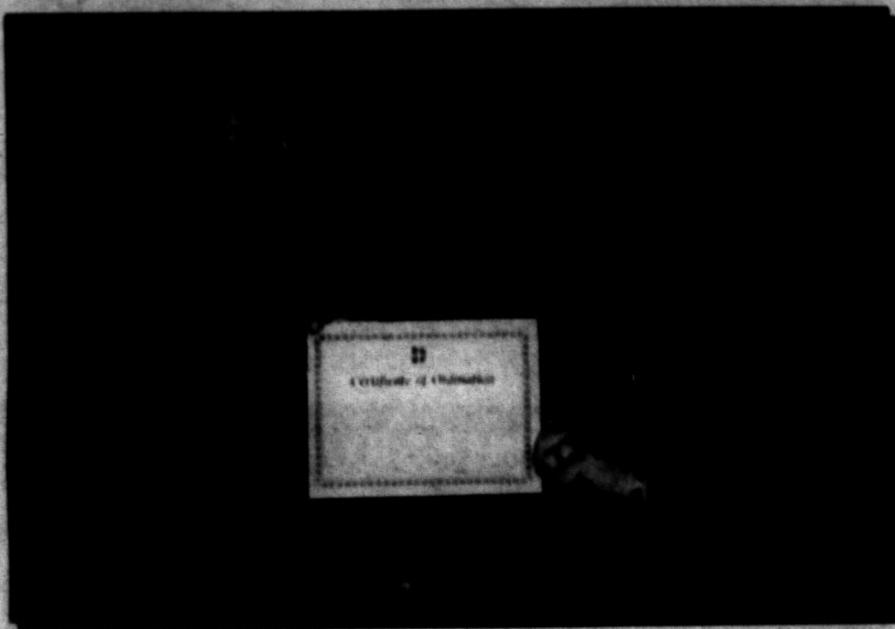
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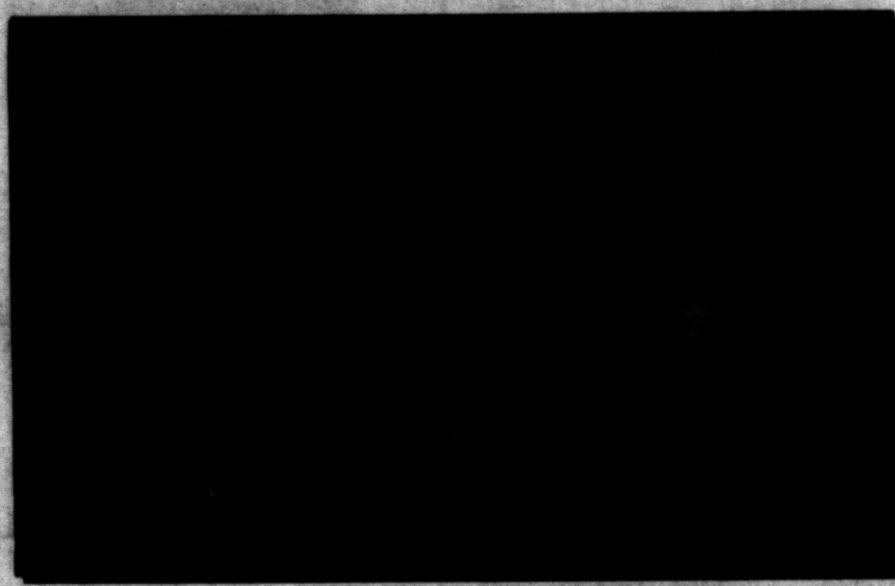
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JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. Foy and Combs



3. Smith and Purvis



4. Deacon ordination, Trinity Church



5. Grace Church, Columbus, children

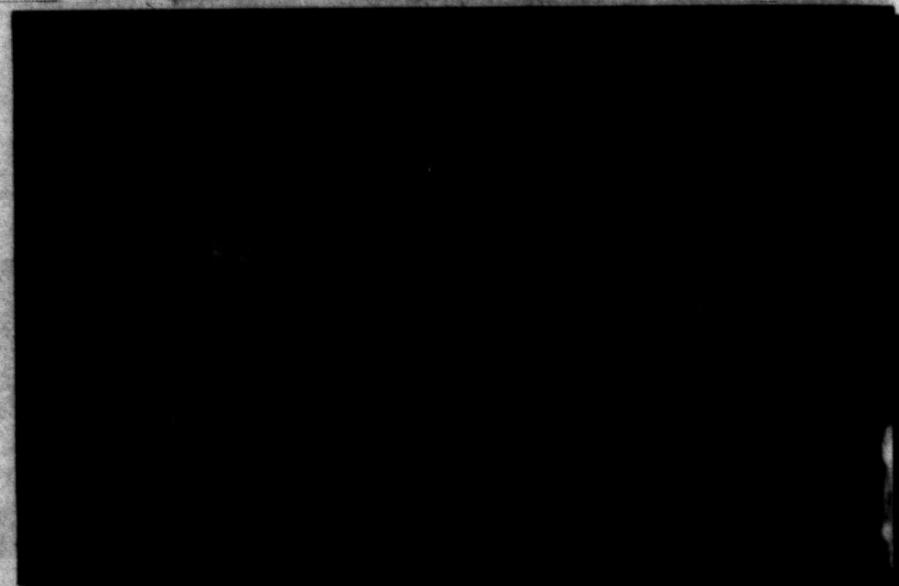


BAPTISTS

1. **Bethel Church, Brandon,** ordained Casey Foy as deacon Dec. 7. Shown are Foy and pastor Darby Combs.
2. **Hathorn Church, Goss,** will hold its first annual Bible celebration Dec. 28 - 31. Sun., 11 a.m.; Mon. - Wed., 6:30 p.m.. Free Bibles distributed New Year's Eve. Don Taylor, speaker; Duke & Linda Barnes, music.
3. **Stanton Church, Natchez,** licensed Matt Smith to the ministry Nov. 23. Shown are Smith and pastor Steve Purvis.
4. **Trinity Church, Vicksburg,** ordained Phil Griffing and Billy Bratcher as deacons Nov. 30. Shown are Griffing, his wife Linda, Bratcher, and his wife Sandy.
5. Children from **Grace Church, Columbus,** recently delivered cards and sang Christmas songs at local nursing homes. Shown are the participants.
6. **Stronghope Church, Wesson,** recently celebrated pastor appreciation month and honored their pastor, Robin Risher. Shown are Risher, his wife Tracy, and children Casey, Jake, and Buck.
7. **First Church, Morton,** recently honored Holmes Carlisle with a day in his honor. He received a plaque from the church. A scholarship fund was established in his honor for seminary students. Carlisle has served several churches and was the AMD of Scott Association from 1961 - 1991. Shown are pastor Earl Clark and Carlisle.
8. **First Church, New Albany,** ordained Kenny Rakestraw and Lane Cavender as deacons Nov. 30. Shown are Rakestraw, his wife Donna, pastor Rick Blythe, Cavender, and his wife Julie.
9. The Women's Ministry of **First Church, Fannin,** held an Evening of Encouragement for their staff wives, with dinner, music, testimonies, and other goodies. Shown are Kim Abercrombie, Debbie Bird, and Gloria Barnes.



6. The Rishe family



7. Clark and Carlisle



8. Deacon ordination, First Church, New Albany



9. First Church, Fannin, staff wives

COLLEGE AND SEMINARY NEWS

1. Christina Teel, an English honors student, and Johnny Mattox, chair of the department of mathematics and natural sciences, have been named the **Blue Mountain College HAEDWAE** (Higher Education Appreciation Day/Working for Academic Excellence) student and faculty member for 2009.
2. Daniel Caldwell, dean of the Cooper School of Missions and Biblical Studies at **William Carey University**, presents Matt Warren, a junior nursing major, with the E. R. Pinson Scholarship from the Board of Ministerial Education. Warren plans to serve in medical missions. He is from Calhoun City and has served as a youth intern at his home church, First Church, Calhoun City.
3. The Center for Creative Scholars at **William Carey University** will host a Creativity Write-Down for second through twelfth graders Saturday, January 31 from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. in the Thomas Business Building on the Hattiesburg campus. The cost of the workshop is \$30 and includes tuition, lunch and instructional materials. The fee is due January 14. For more information call (601) 318-6205 or email rdket@wmcarey.edu.
4. For the seventh consecutive year, **Blue Mountain College** has been named a Champions of Character institution by the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. The NAIA selects schools for the honor by judging student athletes, coaches, faculty, administration and supporters in five areas: respect, responsibility, integrity, servant leadership and sportsmanship. The Champions of Character program is designed to instill an understanding of character values in sport and provide practical tools for student-athletes, coaches and parents to use in modeling exemplary character traits.
5. Janet Williams of Biloxi is the new associate dean of nursing for extended campuses at **William Carey University**. She will be responsible for general oversight of the nursing programs in Gulfport and New Orleans and will direct all nursing programs on the coast campus.



1. Mattox and Teel

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2. Caldwell and Warren



5. Williams

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Pres. Bush taken to woodshed for theological gaffes

WASHINGTON (BP) — Evangelicals formed part of President Bush's base during his two campaigns and have been some of his staunchest supporters, but they likely could do without comments he made to ABC's *Nightline* program in which he said, among other things, that there are multiple ways to God.

It's not the first time Bush has said something publicly that falls outside the bounds of Christian orthodoxy. In 2003 he told a news conference he believes Christians and Muslims worship the same God — a belief he has repeated at least twice, including during the *Nightline* interview.

During the Dec. 8 ABC program, co-anchor Cynthia McFadden asked the president if he believes that his prayers are directed to the same God "that a Muslim prays to."

"I do," Bush said.

"That's gotten you in some trouble with your base," McFadden responded.

"Maybe it does," Bush said. "I do believe there is an Almighty that is broad and big enough, loving enough, that can encompass a lot of people. I don't think God is a narrow concept. I think it's a broad concept. I just happen to believe the way to God is through Christ, and others have different avenues toward God, and I believe we pray to the same Almighty — I do."

The rest of the interview was a mixed bag as far as evangelicals are concerned, but his comments on the exclusivity of the Gospel have caused the most consternation among evangelicals, particularly since his views stand in conflict to biblical passages such as John 14:6 and Acts 4:12.

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, said that upon hearing Bush's latest comments, he had the same reaction as to when Bush "has said similar things."

"I am very grateful that we have a president who is a person of personal and deeply committed faith in Jesus Christ, but statements like these remind us that he is indeed commander-in-chief, not theologian-in-chief," Land told Baptist Press. "I know the president, and he is a person of strong faith and has sort of a C.S. Lewis Basic Christianity kind of faith that is very deep and profound in his personal life, but he is not a theologian. In this particular instance, he is wrong."

"The Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not Allah, and there are not many paths to God."

Land previously told Baptist Press regarding similar comments by Bush, "Jesus our Savior has made it clear that we must know His Father through faith in Him and Him alone."

During the *Nightline* interview Bush also was asked how, in discerning God's will, he determines whether it's actually God's will or it's Bush's own ego. "I think one way you make sure it's not your ego is you stay in the Bible. At least that's what I have found, and I am still learning. The Bible is an amazing book."

Asked if the Bible is "literally true," Bush said, "Probably not. No, I'm not a literalist but I think you can learn a lot from it."

McFadden then asked if it was possible to "love the Bible" and also believe in evolution.



BUSH, LAND DISAGREE — President George W. Bush (left) may have received the 2006 John Leland Religious Liberty Award from Richard Land, president of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, but Land has been critical of Bush recently for remarks he made that seem to be at odds with established Christian theology. (BP photo courtesy of Eric Draper/The White House)

"I think you can have both. Look, you're getting me way out of my lane here. I'm just a simple president, but I think that God created the earth, created the world. I think the creation of the world is so mysterious it created something as large as an Almighty and I don't think it's incompatible with the scientific proof that there is evolution."

Bush also said that his faith, along with prayer, "has made a huge difference in my life."

"People say, 'Oh, it's just a crutch.' Well, for me, it's not a crutch. For me, it is the realization of a power, of a universal God, and recognition that God came manifested in human [form] and then died for sins."

Minister's wives gather, hear 'Mary'



Rita Sweatt (right), a member of First Church, Amory, performs *At the Feet of Jesus*, a monologue of the Biblical character Mary of Bethany, for the Ministers' Wives Conference in the Chapel of First Church, Jackson. The conference is held each year prior to the start of the annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. In addition to the 35-minute monologue, Sweatt's presentation included a second session on Listening and Loving at the Feet of Jesus. Sweatt's husband Lloyd pastors First Church, Amory. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

National WMU plans cost-cutting measures

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP) — With the U.S. economy projected to worsen in 2009, the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) auxiliary of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has announced a series of measures to ensure the organization can retain its staff and stay focused on its mission of involving children, youth, and adults in the Great Commission.

During a Dec. 10 meeting at the 120-year-old organization's Birmingham, Al., headquarters, WMU Executive Director Wanda S. Lee told employees about the measures, which include budget reductions, streamlining expenses, a hiring freeze on vacant positions, a reduction on employer contributions to employee retirement plans, a freeze on merit pay increases, elimination of incentive bonuses in 2009, and the implementation of four weeks unpaid furlough for each staff member between January and August 2009.

The hiring freeze and reduced retirement contributions will continue until Sept. 30, 2009, according to a Dec. 12 statement released by the organization.

WMU leadership focused on avoiding layoffs and keeping health insurance affordable employees, Lee said.

"Let me reinforce our commitment to you of doing everything possible to preserve all jobs at WMU and maintain affordable health care coverage for every person," Lee told the employees. "These have been our top priorities during these days of evaluating our financial situation."

The steps were being taken to position the organization to weather difficult financial times predicted by economic experts.

"These were very difficult decisions to make and difficult ones for our staff to hear," Lee said, "but all indications are that the economic picture for our nation will worsen in 2009 before it improves. These measures were necessary for us to rise above a worst-case scenario during what is projected to be the most challenging economic times for our nation since the Great Depression," Lee said.

Under a revised 2009 budget of \$9.6 million, WMU will be self-supporting through the sale of products and from investments, according to the statement.

THE VILLAGE VIEW



Dr. Barry L. Lee, Executive Director

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DEC. 9 - DEC. 12

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BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

The Message of Missions

Luke 2:8-12, 16-18, 25-32

By Bill Patterson

Quick! Name two things Baptists are known for in most communities. As the one posing the question, I am aware that I have had more time to think of an answer. What did you come up with? The items that came to my mind the quickest were food and fussing. Baptists love to eat. I remember as a child when the word "fellowship" was announced, a divine appointment with food was in my immediate future. On the flip side, it is almost impossible to find a Southern Baptist church that has not had their share of arguments or dissension. What is both shameful and ironic are those individuals that eagerly share a meal with other members of the church, as well as sow seeds of discord within the same body of believers.

Few things could be more blasphemous than a church member who thrives on disharmony within the fellowship. Terry Ledbetter, a pastor friend of mine, probably said it best when he stated, "Some Baptists are born again and some are born against".

I had the idea one time that we should combine these two staples of church life and have a big food fight. Thankfully, Scriptures address the struggle of unity that every church faces. So put down that chicken leg and pick up your Bible with me.

I. Red Rover (Romans 14:1, 10-12)

Do you remember the rules of the childhood game red rover? The rules of red rover were simple: dominate or be dominated. If you had the com-

Patterson

bination of strength and speed you could break through the interlocked arms of the opposing team. If this was accomplished, you could take someone from their team and they became a part of your team. If you failed to penetrate the opposition you became a part of them. It is a simple game of strategy, dominance, and numbers. When the rival team called out your name, you looked for the weakest link to pierce so as to assure the greatest chance of victory.

Does any of this jog your memory? Do any of these rules sound like how we treat prospective members of the church? To celebrate in the weakness others is not a godly behavior. Many churches have adopted the mindset that some do not meet the "standard" to be a member of "their" congregation. In these verses Paul wrote not only to rebuke these early believers, but to encourage them to "accept the one who is weak in faith" (NASB).

Paul is not referring to lost people, rather brothers and sisters in Christ. How sad it is when Christians choose to hurt and prey on fellow believers.

II. Rehearsed Rights (Romans 14:13, 19-21)

At the root of all this is pride. When we concern ourselves with critiquing everyone in the church, we begin to act in a self righteous manner. One primary indication of a prideful attitude is the constant assertion of one's rights. Many would rather promote their individual causes and agendas than act benevolently toward a struggling member of the church. These individuals have their rights and privileges rehearsed and are quick to let you know of their piety. Most conflicts in the church stem from the promotion of rights over the promotion of the gospel. The trouble with this type of behavior is the effect it has on others. Paul conveyed in verse 13 the danger pride can have in a Christian's life. He wrote when someone judges another they become a stumbling block to those around him or her.

III. Righteous Reproach (Romans 15:1-6)

Who better to bring clarity to all of these issues than Jesus? Paul used the life of Christ to provide a reproach to churches for all generations. We see in these verses the urging to imitate Jesus. With all of our buildings, budgets, and beliefs, how good a job are we doing when it comes to resembling the Lord? There is no more crucial calling for the church to heed than modeling and sharing with our communities and neighborhoods the good news of salvation provided by Jesus.

Many church leaders wonder why people are not attracted to the local church like they used to be. I cannot make a long list of promises in regards to where you attend worship services, but I assure you of one thing. If we serve our fellow man, imitate Jesus, and strive for unity, the local church will be blessed and used by God in astonishing ways.

Patterson is pastor of First Church, Richland

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

For Christmas

Luke 1:26-38, 46-48, 54-55

By Joyce C. Rogers

Luke was the only gospel writer who was not Jewish. He was Gentile. He made a thorough investigation of Jesus' coming, life, death and resurrection.

In the Holman Bible Dictionary, three pages of single type list the Messianic Prophecies of the Old Testament and their fulfillment in the New Testament. For example, Isaiah 7:14 predicts the virgin birth. Matthew 1:22-23 gives the fulfillment. God's plan of salvation began to be revealed even in Genesis.

Only two angels are named in the Bible: Michal and Gabriel. When the angel Michal is mentioned, he is a fighter. Gabriel brings special messages from God (Holman Bible Dictionary). Gabriel brought special messages to Zachariah, who is to be the father of John, and to Mary, who is to be the mother of Jesus.

Later an unnamed angel appeared to Joseph.

John the Baptist's coming to prepare the way of the Lord began the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. Because of his unbelief, Zachariah would not be able to speak again until Gabriel's announcement came true.

Hear the Message of Christmas

Young Jewish girls knew that some day one of them would be the mother of the Messiah. There could be no higher honor. Mary was from a poor but pious family. She was submissive to Gabriel's announcement but filled with wonder. Mary was betrothed (engaged) to Joseph, who was a descendant of David. We are not given Mary's ancestry, but I like to think that she, too, was from the house of David.

We, too, are filled with wonder when we think of the

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Messiah's coming and what that meant to the world. God's promise to David that his house would be blessed forever (2 Samuel 7:29 HCSB) is fulfilled. One of Jesus' many names or titles is Son of David.

A modern way to hear the message of Christmas

Christmas is to see the movie "The Nativity" and/or to read the book "The Nativity" by Angela Hunt.

Ask About the Message of Christmas

Mary's question to Gabriel, "How can this be?" was not asked in disbelief. God knows our thoughts and motivation. Zachariah's question to Gabriel was unbelieving. He was left speechless. In contrast, Mary was told "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35b HCSB).

Mary was told of her elderly relative, Elizabeth, who was in her sixth month of pregnancy. This, too, was God's intervention in the history of mankind. Gabriel made this powerful statement in Luke

1:37, "For nothing will be impossible with God."

Believe the message of Christmas

Mary accepted Gabriel's message. She must have known it would change her life drastically. If the message came from God, however, it had to be good. She agreed with the angel's announcement in a beautiful, unquestioning, submissive way. Her blessedness would become her sorrow, however, when she would see her beloved son crucified.

All of us should submit to God's plan for our lives. That plan includes believing God sent His Son into the world to save us from our sins.

Mary acted on her belief by going to visit Elizabeth. It is unlikely that Mary, probably in her early teens, would have been allowed to travel alone to the hill country of Judea. Perhaps she traveled with a group of relatives or friends going that way.

Celebrate the Message of Christmas

When Mary entered the home of Zachariah and Elizabeth, Elizabeth greeted

her in a most unusual way. Elizabeth knew that the child Mary was carrying was the Lord! Only by the Holy Spirit could Elizabeth have recognized the child. Luke 1:39-45 (HCSB) gives details. Everyone did not understand Mary's condition. It is likely that Mary suffered ridicule because of her condition.

I spent two Christmases in Israel. Christmas was not celebrated in most places. It felt strange to see people going to work and completely ignoring the Christmas season. There were celebrations in Bethlehem and Nazareth. Tourists from all over the world go to Bethlehem at Christmas time. Nazareth has enough Christians to make the celebration known there.

There are many good ways to celebrate Christmas. Projects to help the poor are all around us. Beautiful music will be heard in our churches and elsewhere. Families gather and feast together.

Let us remember that "Jesus is the Reason for the Season."

Rogers is a member of Main Street Church, Hattiesburg.

Merry Christmas

The staff of The Baptist Record wishes you and your family a joyous celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and a Happy New Year. We are grateful for your support of this ministry of information, and look forward to being a part of your 2009 as we work together to help bring Mississippi and the world to Jesus.

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Wanted: Missionaries

Acts 13:1-3; 14:26-27; 26:15-19; Galatians 2:6-10

By Bill Patterson

D'Zhana Simmons lived 118 days without a heart. That's right—with no heart. According to reporter Rasha Madkour in an article for Associated Press on November 20th, the fourteen-year-old received a needed transplant in July but it didn't work properly. How can a person live without a heart? For the 118 days it took to find another heart to transplant, she lived by means of two artificial pumping devices.

D'Zhana said, "I felt like a fake person, but I know I was really here." After adjusting to her new heart, she got out of Holtz Children's Hospital in Miami last month to return home to Clinton, South Carolina.

God has a heart for His world. How can a person live without his heart? Do you have a heart for His world?

Missionaries Are Called (Acts 26:15-19; Gal. 2:6-10)

God called Paul personally. He spoke in Paul's native Hebrew dialect (Saul as opposed to Luke's elsewhere reporting the Greek version, Saulos). God wants people everywhere to hear the good news in their native tongue. How can that happen unless some become cross-cultural missionaries?

God also called Paul dramatically. He shined a bright light that blinded Paul and He spoke thunderously, knocking Paul to the ground. Not every missionary is called verbally or dramatically. Some simply recognize that God has prepared them with gifts and abilities to leave their comfort zone and share the good news with people of other nations. Half of the missionaries appointed by Southern Baptists know to what country or people group they have been called to serve. The others know God has called them to give of themselves

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in international missions and God works out the place after they yield to His call.

God called Paul to witness cross-culturally. Paul also witnessed to his fellow countrymen. In fact he would have died to lead them to a saving knowledge of the truth (Rom. 9:1-3).

When Paul went to Greek cities, he purposefully went to the Jews first. Nevertheless, he remained clear that God called him to witness to the Gentiles.

Missionaries Are

Commissioned (Acts 13:1-3)

While fasting and praying, the church at Antioch heard God's call to send out Paul and Barnabas "to the work to which I have called them." Barnabas and Paul already knew God had called them to mission service. God put His hand of confirmation on their lives through His church.

Prior to this time mission work had spread through individuals on their own. Some even left Jerusalem under persecution; nevertheless, they shared Jesus wherever they went. Now the Holy Spirit spoke through the

church to encourage intentional missions through deliberate church decision.

Hardships may come when a church gives up her leaders to go into mission service. The argument can be raised, "Isn't there plenty of work for the Lord around here?" Of course, there is much to do for the Lord in our local areas.

However, the Holy Spirit equips and enlists Christians to serve in other fields of labor. The International Mission Board is a sending agency that expedites the disciples already called out by the Holy Spirit and confirmed by a local church.

Your church might sponsor a mission project, adopt a people group, go on a mission trip, take the Acts 1:8 challenge (<http://www.ActsOne8.com>), or teach through mission groups. As you do, you could join the Holy Spirit in His call for future missionaries.

Missionaries Are Connected

(Acts 14:26-27)

The job of a missionary is to share the good news in a different culture. Another part of the job is to report back to the churches that prayed for them, equipped

them, and sent them out.

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch to lead history's first church missionary conference. They spent a long time discussing what God among the Gentiles.

In their last trustee meeting, the IMB reported 5,541 international missionaries. The IMB is the largest missionary-sending agency in the world. Southern Baptists are thankful to God for what He is doing through our missionaries and the people with whom they work. Yet, thousands of people groups have not yet heard the good news.

In his book, *To the Ends of the Earth*, IMB President Jerry Rankin raised an important question. Did God really intend that only one of three thousand active Southern Baptist church members witness among ninety-five percent of the world while the rest of us live contentedly among the remaining five percent who already have abundant opportunity to hear the gospel? How do you answer Dr. Rankin? Do you have a heart for God's world?

Patterson is pastor of First Church, Richland

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

When Others Cared for You

I Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

By Joyce C. Rogers

The apostle Paul mourned that he had been forced to leave the Thessalonians before he was ready. His heart is still with them. He wanted them to know of his concern for them and how much he longed to be with them.

As a trade center, Thessalonica was a place where travelers passed through going all over the known world. Good news traveled fast in a world shaped by Greek ideas of travel and communication.

Personal Words

I have been a member of a number of churches due to my husband's vocation as a military chaplain and also as a pastor. Some people became so dear to our hearts that it was painful to leave them. We love to correspond with some whom we never expect to see

again in this life.

Paul recognized the hand of Satan in frustrating any plans he made to return to Thessalonica.

The Thessalonians were not only a source of joy here, but were also his hope of glory and joy in heaven. How happy we will be when we see those in heaven whom we led to confess faith in the Lord Jesus!

Encouraging People

Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica when Paul could no longer stand not knowing their welfare. We are not told exactly why Paul could not go himself, but apparently it was due to persecution. Timothy's absence left him alone for a time. Paul was anxious to know that the Thessalonians were standing firm in their faith.

Little things do mean a lot. In one church where I attended



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alone for only a few months (my husband had duties elsewhere), a lady about my age made it a point to always sit with me in church. She encouraged me and made me feel welcome.

Those who encourage others may not realize how much their kind words and actions can mean. Christian friends are priceless.

Affirming Words

Timothy brought reassuring news about the Thessalonians. They were standing firm in spite of the persecution Paul knew would come. They had fond memories of Paul and wanted to see him again. These affirming words brought joy to Paul.

Paul prayed earnestly for the Thessalonians. He longed to see them grow spiritually.

How we should pray for others! I'm afraid we modern Christians don't take prayer requests as seriously as we should. Individual prayer lists are helpful. A daily quiet

time is essential.

A man I used to know (now deceased) wrote affirming words to everyone he knew when the recipient did anything noteworthy. Those notes were treasured.

A lady in my present church called every member of the church on their birthday and sang "Happy Birthday" to them. I understand she did this for years until her health failed.

Loving Prayers

It is so good to express our love for God and for others in prayer. Paul's prayer and benediction in I Thessalonians is a beautiful example. His love overflowed for the new believers.

In verse 13 his prayer is for the Lord to "make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints" (HCSB). This "holiness" comes from a relationship with the Lord and is seen through the actions of the believer. It is not possible on our own, but it is expected of every believer. It is not a prerogative of a special few. It is true that some

Christians take their faith more seriously than others, but being blameless and holy should be goals for all believers.

In one transient church involving many military families, the custom was to surround the departing member or family on their last Sunday. Hands were laid on shoulders as the pastor or someone else prayed for them. Parents would get their children from the nursery so they would be included on these occasions.

Loving prayer for one another is such a blessing. Prayer can melt cold hearts and bring about reconciliation. I know about one situation where prayer broke the barrier of disagreement between two families. The result brought revival to that church.

The prophet Samuel said, "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (I Samuel 12:23 KJV). May we go and do likewise.

Rogers is a member of Main Street Church, Hattiesburg.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

THE BAPTIST Record

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if

submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items are generally not publishable. Photographs can not be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape-, building-, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

Pro-lifers anxiously await new president, Congress

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — Faced with a strengthened pro-abortion majority in Congress and a new pro-abortion president, pro-life groups are gearing up for a political fight to prevent passage of the Freedom of Choice Act, a bill that could set back their cause by decades.

FOCA, as it is often called, has been proposed by abortion rights supporters for two decades but now actually may have the votes for passage, particularly with President-elect Obama — a FOCA supporter — in office. It has several prongs:

- FOCA would make abortion a "fundamental right" for women and ensure that abortion remains legal even if *Roe v. Wade* someday is overturned. *Roe v. Wade* was the test case in 1973 that allowed the U.S. Supreme Court to legalize abortion during all nine months of pregnancy.

- FOCA would once again legalize partial-birth abortion, when a full-formed baby ready to be born is partially delivered and then killed by suctioning the baby's brains from the skull. Partial-birth abortion is currently prohibited, with exceptions.

- FOCA would nullify all restrictions on abortion such as waiting periods and parental notification laws.

- FOCA would likely require taxpayer funding of abortion.

Pro-abortion activists thought they had the votes to pass FOCA when President Bill Clinton took office in 1993 with a pro-abortion Congress, but pro-lifers successfully killed it. It was re-introduced in the current Congress the day after the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the federal ban on partial-birth abortion, with supporters of the bill championing the legislation because it would reverse the ban.

Even though Obama won't be inaugurated until Jan. 20, pro-life groups already are educating and mobilizing their constituents. Americans United for Life launched a website, FightFoca.com, with an online petition that has accumulated more than 300,000 signatures opposing the bill.

National Right to Life also has a petition (www.nrlc.org) that can be printed out and mailed to the group's



50 MILLION AND COUNTING — Pro-lifers in Washington, D.C., hold signs at a rally showing the number of abortions performed each year in the U.S., which now exceeds 50 million since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Pro-life leaders are concerned that the election of a pro-abortion president and Congress last November could set the pro-life movement back severely, particularly if Barak Obama signs the Freedom of Choice Act into law. (BP photo)

Washington office. Both organizations say they will let members of Congress know the results.

Douglas Johnson, legislative director for National Right to Life, said pro-lifers lost about 15 seats in the House and at least five in the Senate during the November election — a Senate total that could jump to six if incumbent pro-life Republican Sen. Norm Coleman loses the current vote recount in Minnesota to pro-abortion Democrat Al Franken.

Johnson estimates that pro-lifers "may be in a little bit more jeopardy

now than we were" when Clinton was inaugurated in 1993. Part of that is because Obama is "more unrelenting" in his pro-abortion views than was Clinton, Johnson says. Obama was one of 19 Senate co-sponsors of FOCA.

Asked in 2007 at a Planned Parenthood meeting what he would do as president to make sure abortion remains legal, Obama replied "the first thing I'd do as president is sign" FOCA, whereas Clinton, who also supported FOCA, "would sometimes fold" on the issue of abortion, Obama so far has not, Johnson said.

"Obama has never budged one inch on any issue touching abortion throughout his career in the (Illinois) legislature or the Congress — even on issues where many other (pro-abortion) lawmakers came over to our side, like the partial-birth issue or the born-alive infants issue," Johnson said. "If you put all that together, we have to recognize that there is a very real danger that the new Congress could approve something even as radical as the Freedom of Choice Act."

When Clinton took office, there were 57 senators and 258 representatives from his own party. Including independents who caucus with Democrats, Obama will have at least 57 senators and 256 representatives.

Days after Obama's election, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops went on record warning about the dangers of FOCA, with some saying the bill could force Catholic hospitals to choose between performing abortions and shutting down. Other religious-run hospitals could face similar decisions.

Such a move could have a dramatic impact on the health care system. In his Nov. 12 Washington Update e-mail, Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council cited statistics from conservative blogger Ed Morrissey and wrote, "Catholics run more than 550 hospitals and 415 clinics in America, spending billions out of pocket to help the disadvantaged get the care they need. Under FOCA, religious providers would have two options: either comply with the abortion mandate or end their services completely. Is Congress so intent on appeasing Planned Parenthood that it would jeopardize the health care of 90 million Americans? We'll see."

The good news for pro-lifers is that the bill has not passed the House or Senate this Congress, much less made it through a committee.

Bush's abortion executive orders threatened

WASHINGTON (BP) — Rules barring federal funds for abortion promotion overseas and embryonic stem cell research appear to be the likely pro-life targets for reversal by executive orders from President-elect Barack Obama.

After he is sworn in Jan. 20 as the 44th U.S. president, Obama could rescind without congressional action those policies now in effect. Pro-lifers fear he could overturn both within days after taking office.

"I'm very concerned that President-elect Obama, having tacked to the center on economic and foreign policy, will tack hard left on social issues such as the right to life in order to placate his radical leftist supporters," said Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville. "I pray that my fears will not be confirmed."

One rule, which was first instituted in 1984 and is known as the Mexico City Policy, prohibits grants to organizations that promote or perform abortions in foreign countries. The other order, issued by President Bush in 2001, bans funds for stem cell

research that results in the destruction of embryos.

Those policies are "particularly vulnerable to unilateral" action by Obama, said Douglas Johnson, long-time legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee. "I expect he will nullify the Mexico City Policy right away" and "will quickly dismantle" the ban on funding of embryonic stem cell research (ESCR), Johnson told Baptist Press.

Kristen Day, executive director of Democrats for Life of America, also expressed pessimism about the Mexico City Policy's survival. "Unfortunately, I'm not sure we can win that one," Day told BP.

She voiced hope, however, about retaining the prohibition on ESCR funding. "The embryonic stem cell research [rule] is where we are focused," she said. "I think [reversing the ESCR funding ban] would be something realistically that would be a good one not to do. We're pushing the administration not to [rescind it]."

The effect of a reversal of the Mexico City Policy "will be to open the flood-

gates of taxpayer funding of groups that promote abortion in foreign countries" as a method of family planning, Johnson told BP. The result of repealing that rule "will be to take [money] away from groups that are promoting contraception and give it to groups that are promoting abortion," he said.

President Bill Clinton rescinded the Mexico City Policy when he took office in 1993. After Bush was inaugurated in 2001, he restored the rule initiated by President Reagan and continued by Bush's father. The policy was named after the city at which it was announced during a 1984 conference.

Obama likely would reverse another pro-life policy with the anticipated aid of Congress. The Bush administration has refused to forward congressionally-approved money for the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) for seven consecutive years, based on the agency's support of China's coercive population-control program. Next year, congressional passage of funds for UNFPA would enable Obama to send the money on to the controversial agency.